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GOOD GOVERNMENT AND THE SUFFRAGE

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The cynic's retort to the advocate of good government is "Your government is as good as you make it; why, therefore, fret yourself with dreams you have failed to realize!" The retort is easily answered. "Good" means better, and "you" looks as far into the past as good does into the future. Such degree of betterment in government as we enjoy today is not due alone to the desires or activities of the present generation, but to the cumulated efforts of all, past and present, who have contributed to the enlightenment of mankind in the field of political science and in the art of governing. Likewise what we of this generation may think or do will bear fruit, some today and some long after our generation has passed away. The vision of today becomes the reality of tomorrow. If our cynical friend demands proof, point him to the history of men and institutions. If he dwells upon the accounts of evil doing, personal and public, with which the daily press is filled, bid him contrast, for example, the cities of the twentieth century with those of the eighteenth, marking especially the change in public sentiment in England since 1835, in the United States since 1880, and take courage.

With this thought for my justification, I venture to ask your consideration of some reflections concerning good government and the suffrage and their relation to the immediate future. The completion of the phase through which we are passing is near at hand, but the present generation is not likely to witness the full development of the next phase. Under it government promises to be better adapted to meet the needs of men than any which has heretofore existed.

Without attempting to find a new term for the present political era, which we call democratic, I would describe it as characteristically, though not completely nor in every instance, destructive. For more than a hundred years we have been renovating the structure of government and reorganizing the political forces. There have been much noise and confusion and some tearing down and carting away of good

material; but, on the whole, the work has been well done and it has been necessary. The next phase will be constructive. The precise form which government will take is not important, nor need we concern ourselves with details of organization further than to note certain departures from the present type. These departures are constructive in character. They surprise us only because, being out of harmony with a destructive age, they nevertheless work well. Again, with the imperfections of the next phase we shall have little to do. It is sufficient to observe in passing that the age of constructive governmental development will, like the present, yield to another in course of time. Each generation is called upon to look to the next and no further; to seek to make its institutions better, not to know the ultimate best.

In the work of renovation, the ballot has been more relied upon than any other device for the removal of governmental rubbish. The extension of the suffrage from the few to the many has been synchronous with the marvellous development of the past hundred years, and seems to have been a necessary as well as an inseparable incident of the growth of the nations of western Europe and America. The ballot is well adapted also to placing good political material in position; but its functions, though important, are few and there are other instruments and forces which will be called into use as we pass into the great constructive era of political history.

If this conclusion is correct, it would seem to follow that we are not now called upon to extend its use further. Nevertheless, I think it both futile and foolish to attempt to prevent the ultimate extension of the suffrage to all citizens, excepting only aliens, minors, and those deprived of their liberty, or found personally incompetent by due process of law. What then! Good government will not have gone to smash. The famous Reform Coach, depicted as dashing at top speed, without break, down the tortuous hill of popular suffrage, will have arrived at the bottom. No one will have been much hurt. Some bruises will have been sustained, no doubt, and some estimable gentlemen inside considerably shaken up, but everybody will be quite able to continue the journey.

What will happen when everyone has the right to vote will not differ in any material respect from what has happened both in connection with this and other movements. Having at last secured to themselves the right, they will soon cease to regard it as of more than secondary importance. That which most people desire is the right to do or to be

or to have, not the accompanying responsibility. Give them the right and the moment they come in sight of the resulting obligation they shrink from exercising it, except when the necessity actually arises. In other words, if we are all permitted to vote we will turn our attention to the really vital business of forming sound public opinion.

A wise mother once cured a restive boy of a practice dangerous to travelers by relying upon this principle of human nature. "My son," she said, "I have told you many times not to put your head out of the window. I shall say no more about it. But remember this. It is your head and if it is knocked off it will be your fault, not mine." The small boy looked grieved. The responsibility was more than he bargained for, but during the rest of the journey he observed the salutary custom of cautious travelers.

May we not safely rely upon human nature in this matter as in others?

But before we proceed further, something should be said in justification of the statement that it is both futile and foolish to attempt to defeat the further extension of the suffrage.

First, as to the futility of such an attempt: It is folly, some say, to proceed further in the extension of the suffrage. It should be limited rather than extended. But it is vain to talk of folly unless what is happening can be prevented. We (whoever *we* may mean) are not giving the people anything. To be sure, legislatures from time to time pass laws, but in cases of this kind the legislatures merely register the popular will. The people have taken the right and they will continue to do so—right or privilege, whichever you choose to call it—and the "we" who talk about giving and granting cannot prevent it. The time to have talked of giving or withholding is past. The time to have made effective protest was during the younger Pitt's ministry, when Charles Grey presented the petition of the Friends of the People in parliament and when, on this side of the water, the young republic was engaged in its first struggle for existence. It was already too late when, thirty-nine years later, Earl Grey forced the unwilling Lords to pass the first reform bill, and when in America we were gathering the shrivelled fruit of the rotation in office theory of government. It is worthy of note in passing, for the incident marks the inevitableness of the movement, that among the listening crowd in the gallery of the house of lords on that memorable October night in 1831 was the youthful Gladstone, then wholly conservative, attending his first parliamentary debate, but destined to become the author of the third great reform bill in 1884.

The last stage of the suffrage movement is now well on its way. From the beginning the object sought has been definite and simple, within the comprehension of everybody. From the standpoint of the individual it is certainly just and, on the whole, advantageous. Finally, the movement is world-wide. How, then, is it reasonably possible to doubt the outcome?

Second, as to the folly of attempting to prevent the further extension of the suffrage: In spite of the logic of events, there are those who insist (though I suspect with more hope than confidence) that universal suffrage is not inevitable. We can limit the vote, they say. It is not too late and we ought to begin by refusing it to women, both for their sakes and in the interests of good government. These base their argument upon the hypothesis that the suffrage movement was not a necessary incident to political developments of the nineteenth century, and assert that, in relying upon this device, the advocates of democratic government blundered. They foresee an end of progress if universal suffrage is actually brought in. Having followed a false channel, the ship will have foundered on the shoals of democracy. They are persuaded of the soundness of this conclusion because, as they assert, the people having grasped a right were never known to give up anything, and, once armed with the right to vote, restrictions of any sort will be impossible. But this assertion is not supported by the facts. Do our streets bristle with bayonets and men go about armed to the teeth now that the right of the people to keep and bear arms is established? The grant of right of assembly did not develop an inordinate desire for public gatherings, and freedom of speech has not resulted in the cultivation of the art of slander. Libel and slander, riot and murder are still much too frequent, but we are far freer from them now than when people were denied the right to meet and speak freely and to go armed. So long as these rights were withheld, the people were ready to fight and did fight to the death to secure them. Once in possession, they went about their several occupations leaving it to the selected few to assemble, to do the public speaking and the fighting.

Or take a more suggestive instance, the commission form of government and the short ballot. In localities where these have been instituted the people formerly had the right to elect every public official from the mayor to the least significant administrative officer, but they have chosen to limit the exercise of their power and call in the expert.

Hence the folly of attempting to defeat the further extension of the

suffrage, when if it is allowed to run its course, we shall be relieved of much fruitless discussion and the way will be opened for the next, the constructive stage of democratic government.

I have said that the extension of the suffrage during the nineteenth century seems to have been a necessary incident of the growth of nations or in the western world. Is this assumption well founded? A careful reading of the early writers reveals few exponents of a consistent belief in universal suffrage. That the center of political gravity, slowly working its way down from the king, through the hereditary classes to commoners, must at last respond to the physical law and be found in the midst of the whole mass was the belief of the more radical writers; but that this should be determined merely by counting the number of heads is to misconstrue entirely their meaning. It is true that the masses in England, unaccustomed to dealing with political questions, joined the agitators for the reform of parliamentary representation under the erroneous impression that more votes meant more bread. They did not perceive that their distress was due primarily to economic causes and hence were sadly disappointed over the results of the act of 1832. The real relief that followed the repeal of the corn laws did not dispel their illusion. Giving men the right to vote for members of parliament was such a simple remedy. The idea was so easily grasped compared with the perplexing arguments advanced by the economists. Nevertheless the masses were relieved by the legislation of 1846 rather than by that of 1832. The reform bills were purely political measures of little use to bread-winners but of immense service in the battle between parliamentary forces contending for supremacy. The victory lay with the lower house and consisted in relocating the center of political power, thenceforth and until the beginning of the present century to rest secure in the house of commons. It is unnecessary to review the situation in the United States. It is, however, necessary to point out, in spite of much expository writing and campaigning, that the result is not manhood suffrage in actual fact, either here or in England. Having secured the right to vote, men have neglected or refused to assume the full measure of their responsibility. It is not enough to attend at the polls and deposit our ballots. We must see to it that our votes really count. In other words, we have not yet had real experience of manhood suffrage, to say nothing of universal suffrage. Consequently, the completion of the present movement involves not merely an extension of the suffrage to women but the dethronement of the political boss. To accomplish

this task much more than a political campaign is necessary. To find the man higher up, to limit the now dominating influence of those who have been forced to protect themselves and their concerns against political pirates, not to mention those who bring sinister influences to bear in order to secure special advantages, all of this is part of the destructive process. To stop there, to assume that this is more than a preliminary step is to sweep and garnish the house and go away and leave it. The spirits who will take up their abodes there will be worse than the first.

But I am not now concerned with analyzing the present political situation nor in framing a program of action for the remainder of the era of renovation. I have pointed to the familiar facts of government by political party machines merely to show that we have had no real experience of manhood suffrage and to repel the possible suggestion that I am throwing the onus of political neglect upon the women, as if they only will shrink from taking responsibility when they share the suffrage equally with the men.

Returning to the contrast presented by the results attending the enactment of the first reform bill and the bill to repeal the corn laws, allow me to narrow the field of inquiry to improvements in municipal government since the completion of the first third of the last century, for it is in this field that those experiments have been tried which foreshadow what may be and which I believe will be characteristic of the constructive era now opening before us. The industrial developments of the last seventy-five years have so profoundly affected western Europe and America that it is impossible to say in many instances what is cause and what effect, or to say what would have been the result of such a movement as the democratization of our political institutions had the industrial progress been lacking. I think it reasonable, however, to believe that municipal changes like those which took place in England in 1835 are due more to a change of view by statesmen in regard to the duty of public officials and their relation to the whole body of the electorate than to any impulse which arose from the extension of the suffrage. The spirit of reform awakened by the passage of the act of 1832 undoubtedly played its part in the parliamentary investigation of 1833 and led up to the passage of the act of 1835. But it was not the controlling nor even the moving force. The same is true of what took place in Prussia prior to the passage of the municipal code of 1853 and in France leading up to the adoption of the changes affecting municipal government in 1884.

The change for the better which has taken place in the United States in the government of our cities beginning with about the year 1880, and especially since the beginning of the present century, has been due in large part to an awakened civic conscience and sense of obligation on the part of our public men, though here the movement has been accentuated by the efforts of municipal reformers not in public office to a greater extent than would have been normal for continental cities, in view of the relation of those cities to the central authorities.

Still one ought not to minimize the direct influence of the exercise of the suffrage both as it has been extended by legal enactment and as it has been more completely exercised by a successful attack upon machine politics. I am merely saying that this of itself is not sufficient to account for the vast change and the increasing rate of speed with which we are developing a better and more efficient type of municipal government. If this improvement were really due to the extension of the suffrage as a cause, then clearly we ought to find that where the most improvement has taken place the largest number of citizens have actually taken part in the selection of officials and in determining the public policy of the city. The investigations which have been carried on during the last ten years by students of political science, as well as by those versed in the practical art of governing municipalities, furnish us with abundant data for a comparison of cities not only in our own country but throughout western Europe. What strikes me as most extraordinary in tracing the developments of municipal governments in these countries is that the results do not accord with our preconceived notions of what ought to occur if the right to vote is in any real sense a guarantee of good government. Take, for example, Washington and any other American city. Compare with these the situation in Prussia and in England. In all of our American cities except Washington the right to participate in the affairs of the city, so far as the selection of public officials is concerned, is legally secure. I say nothing in this connection of the practical diminution of popular power because of the presence of organized party machines. In Washington, on the other hand, no resident has any immediate legal control whatsoever over the appointment of those who make and execute the laws of the city. Washington is the most autocratically governed city in the world, as has frequently been pointed out. On the other hand, so far as the provisions of the statutes are concerned, our other American cities are the most democratically governed. But what is the truth as to the actual government of the city of Washington? The

people are not without a voice and a very potent voice in its affairs. The city is covered by organizations of citizens, each acting within its own district, each officered and controlled by residents actively interested in the welfare of their neighborhood and informed as to local needs. Each of these citizen organizations is quite as active as many city councils. If a bill affecting the interests of the District of Columbia is pending before a committee of congress, representatives from these district organizations appear to argue the case. If the commissioners have in hand a public improvement which affects particularly any locality, the organizations of that locality immediately become active and alert. Appeals are constantly made by these bodies to the several executive departments of the national government charged with the execution of laws affecting the city of Washington. No one who has come into close touch with the situation will fail to perceive the immense influence, amounting to the exercise of positive power, of these organizations composed of citizens who, under the law, are given no political rights whatsoever in the premises.

I have mentioned the commission form of government. I presume it must have occurred to all students of municipal government that this system, which has now spread to more than two hundred and fifty cities of the country, is not unlike the form of city government found in England. There is the small body of citizens vested by the people of the city with fairly complete powers of government. This council of citizens becomes the policy-determining body, acting in that respect as the immediate agents of the people. Its members are heads of the several administrative departments of the city government. The actual work of each department is, however, committed to officers more or less permanent and more or less qualified as experts. I presume that to any American the most striking feature of English municipal government is the existence of a staff of permanent officials, chosen entirely without respect to political affiliations. We have not yet become reconciled to the thought of advertising for town clerks and city engineers but I suspect the time is not far distant when we shall recognize the wisdom of choosing the non-political members of our municipal administrative force with sole reference to their previous training and present qualifications regardless of whether they reside in our locality or not, and as regardless of their political affiliations as we are of the politics of those we employ in our business enterprises. But all of this is an anomaly if the right to vote and to choose directly our political officials is a necessary incident of democratic government.

The superiority of the government of Prussian cities is generally acknowledged. No one, of course, cites Prussia as an instance of democratic government, nor will the Prussian cities be cited to prove either the failure or success of democratic institutions. Usually after paying our tribute of admiration and respect for German municipal arrangements, we dismiss the subject with the statement that this system, existing under monarchical institutions, supported by and dependant upon the strong hand of a highly centralized government, cannot, of course, be adapted to our democratic needs. Granting that this is so, we may nevertheless learn much that is important to the forward view by noting certain elements which account for the admirable results observable in German cities. In the first place, there is the three-class system of voting. Substantially as many men are entitled to vote in a Prussian city as may vote in any city in the United States, but you will recall the fact that under this system the preponderance of influence lies with those who contribute most largely to the payment of taxes. As Professor Munro observes in his admirable account of the system:

The Prussian electoral system is based upon the representation of interests rather than of numbers; and the amount of interest which any citizen possesses in the governance of the city is gauged by the amount of taxes he pays.¹

The three-class system, resulting as it does in shifting the political power from the many to the few, accomplishes in a regular and legal way that which is brought about by indirection under our system of party government. This does not prove its soundness, but we may note in passing that it is one of the many contrasts between our ways and the continental ways of doing things. We make a pretence of democratic government while tolerating political abuses, the very opposite of democratic. In Prussia there is at any rate an avowed purpose to keep the political power in the hands of a few while allowing a voice to all.

But the three-class system is not the most interesting part of Prussian municipal government nor is it an essential part of their scheme. Throughout the whole German system, in almost every department of it, certainly in all administrative departments in which bodies of men coöperate, two elements are invariably found, the expert profes-

¹W. B. Munro, *The Government of European Cities*, p. 132.

sional element working alongside of the non-professional citizen element. The great stroke of genius here is traceable to Baron Stein and his associates.² To secure the services of the expert in matters of administration, and at the same time to guard against the creation of a dominant and dominating bureaucracy by placing at his side, and in equal actual authority with him, a citizen familiar with the needs of his locality and with the non-political affairs of his city is to do in a much more direct and efficient manner than which is accomplished in England by the employment of permanent officials or in the city of Washington through the influence of citizen bodies appearing before the legally constituted officials. It is not sufficient to secure the services of experts and citizens by placing the one over the other or by attempting coöperation between the two sets of men organized into separate bodies. The best way is to bring them together in one body, separating neither the powers, the responsibilities, nor the honors. By this means, each may learn to respect the opinion and be guided by the influence of the other. This system is, so to speak, held in place by the strong hand of a central power which pervades the whole Prussian government. I acknowledge the difficulty of adapting it to democratic institutions, but this is true only because, as a people, we have not yet cultivated that attitude of mind toward government in its relation to popular rights which I believe to be as inevitable as the completion of the present movement toward universal suffrage. When we have come to this new point of view, we shall see the wisdom of effecting a combination like that of the German cities, instead of relying upon our present clumsy and wholly inefficient method, which secures representation of local needs in a certain few matters to the sacrifice of those broader local needs which affect many localities and which are understood only by those especially trained, and to the further sacrifice of anything like a broad-gauged municipal policy. Under the German system, the chief central administrative body has the advice of many deputations or commissions, each like itself composed of experts and citizens, while the several localities are represented not by one spokesman but by many, each especially qualified to represent the local mind concerning the particular need for which each has been chosen as a citizen to speak. The resident of a section of a Prussian city chosen to sit with experts in a deputation appointed to advise concerning poor relief for

² J. R. Seeley, *Life and Times of Stein*.

example will be able to speak with authority upon that subject, although he may be wholly incapable of advising wisely concerning any other local need. The advice and counsel of this deputation of experts and citizens is passed on to the next higher deputation and so on up until at last it reaches the administrative body clothed with power to act. Into the hands of this central body come at last all of the information and the advice necessary for the comprehensive management of the complicated affairs of a great city. This cannot be secured by the mere exercise of the suffrage.

The increasing complexity of political conditions, the very vastness of the problems confronting us, demands the presence of the expert if government is to be in any comprehensive sense good. But the expert must receive both the recognition and the compensation commensurate with his position; otherwise he will not respond to the call. Native power, well trained, devoting itself to business pursuits acquires wealth. If it devotes itself to a professional calling it achieves distinction as an expert. The one is in itself as honorable as the other. Therefore, neither should receive recognition nor be placed in authority above the other. Until now suspicion and intolerance have deprived us of the service of the expert. We view with suspicion those who possess what we lack, whether it be political power or private wealth, and possessing the one we become intolerant of those who possess the other. As the constructive age advances the services of the expert will be more and more relied upon, and if we wisely take counsel of what England has done and especially of Prussia's experiment in bringing about effective coöperation on an equal footing between experts and men of affairs, we shall go far toward wiping out these hindrances to good government. One may speak with assurance here; the forecast is based upon experience. The success of the experiments to which I have alluded may be accounted for by that which grows out of responsibility. Responsibility which cannot be shifted develops caution, a tendency to seek advice and a readiness to coöperate, incompatible with suspicion and intolerance.

The constructive problems of government lie directly ahead of us. We cannot do effective work upon them until the minds of the great body of our countrymen are free to deal with them, and they will not feel free until we have put out of the way that which seems to most of them to be a *sine qua non* of progress. The right to bear arms has been settled. The right of assembly and freedom of speech have been guaranteed. These and other questions of right now recognized have

cleared the way for constructive work. The suffrage question alone remains of those which have been classed as rights denied by statute. Why allow it longer to impede our progress?

We have something vastly more important to do than voting on election day, important as that is, namely, the creation of a sound and controlling public opinion. Without that voting cannot save us, with it voting becomes merely a convenient way of registering opinion and, at most, the method by which the people exercise their reserve powers.